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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 000777

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SUBJECT: ALBANIA DECLARED MINE FREE AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

TIRANA 00000777 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (U) Albania took advantage of the Cartagena Summit on a Mine Free World to declare completion - one year ahead of schedule - of a nine-year project to clear all landmines from its territory to meet its obligations under Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention banning landmines. Since Albania met its requirements under Article 4 in 2004, Albania is now one of only two countries that have declared themselves mine-free since the formation of the Convention. As a result of the 1999 Kosovo war, around 15 square km along the Albania-Kosovo border were identified as contaminated by landmines. In February 2000, the Government of Albania signed the Ottawa convention and began a project with substantial U.S. funding to clear the border area by August 2010. In October of this year, the GOA cleared the last parcel of land and returned it to the local population. During the 9-year project, 12,452 landmines were discovered and subsequently destroyed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' official statement, presented December 1 at the Cartagena Summit, is attached below.

¶2. TextBQQAnti-Personestructiry; take the Qecessary legislative acts to implement the Convetion; provide the due care and assistance to the mine survivors, etc.

Since the ratification of the Convention, Albania has shown a great commitmet to comply with the above obligations in particular with the clearance of all mined contaminated areas under its territory or jurisdiction.

Albania had to deal with the mine problem since the end of the Kosova conflict in 1999 when a total area of about 15.25 square kilometers of border line in northeast Albania was initially identified as contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnances.

The establishment of the national structures of the Albanian Mine Action Committee and the Albanian Mine Action Executive responsible for the formulation and implementation of mine action policies and programme, were essential in ensuring the sustainability of Mine Action Programme in Albania, capable to deal with the consequences of the mine contamination.

In 2006, the Albanian Government with the technical assistance of UNDP and based also on the Nairobi Action Plan formulated the National Mine Action Plan for Completion 2007-2010, which was included under the UNDP Completion Initiative. The Plan outlined in detail the implementation mechanisms and the capacities needed to fulfill the Article 5 obligations. The main goal of the plan was to declare Albania free of mines by the end of 2009, ahead of its August 2010 Article 5 deadline.

The Government of Albania is proud it could announce in this historical Summit the long awaited statement that after almost a decade of work, we have fulfilled our obligation under Article 5 of the Convention, by completing clearance of all known mined areas under our territory.

Several demining organizations have worked in Albania since the outset of the clearance operations including: RONCO, Help Germany, Swiss Foundation for Demining and Dan Church Aid. Since 2004, Dan Church Aid has been the only, active demining operator in the country. The clearance assets of these organizations included manual deminers, demining machines and mine detection dogs. From 2007 onwards DCA has operated with only manual demining teams and a fully nationalized programme with only one expatriate Programme Manager.

A total of 12,452 anti-personnel mines have been found and destroyed in more than 16 million square meters, now released as free of mines and unexploded ordnance. The last mine accident recorded in the mine contaminated areas in Albania is in June 2005.

Building the national capacities has been one of the key features and contributors to success of the Mine Action Programme in Albania. Sustainable capacities for monitoring and coordination of Mine Action activities, humanitarian demining and victim assistance through various projects have been built at the national and local level with the support of various international donors. The major challenge lies ahead of us now is to making an effective use of

TIRANA 00000777 002.2 OF 002

these capacities in other similar projects in Albania.

It is never enough, to recognize that these remarkable achievements would have been impossible without the outstanding support of our donors and partners.

We cannot conclude our statement without conveying a sincere thanking to our loyal donors from the beginning of the programme, such as: the European Union, the Governments of United States of America, the Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Sweden, France, Norway, Austria and Turkey for their steady contribution. Words of appreciation also go for our invaluable partners: the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance in Slovenia, the UNDP, UNMAS, UNICEF, Dan Church Aid and the Swiss Foundation for Demining, RONCO, HELP, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, ICRC, the ALB-Aid and the Albanian Red Cross.

Thanks to this support, we could finally return a mine free land to the people and also be proud of contributing to another success of the Convention.